

## THE CHINESE QUESTION IN 1857

[BRITISH commerce with China, the real beginnings of which date from the early part of the seventeenth century, had been long impeded and crippled by being confined, in conformity with the traditional Chinese policy of exclusiveness, to the single port of Canton. Two famous embassies from George III to the Chinese Emperor,—that of Lord Macartney in 1792, and that of Lord Amherst in 1816,—had failed to bring about any appreciable change in this state of matters; and the restriction became more intolerable than ever after 1834, when the monopoly of the East India Company in the trade with China came to an end, and business with Canton was open to private British merchants. At length, in 1839, certain bickerings between the Chinese mandarins and the British traders, nominally on the subject of the smuggling of opium into China by British subjects, led to an actual war,—the war which forms the subject of De Quincey's previous article on China in this volume. That war lasted till 1842; in the August of which year, after severe losses inflicted on the Chinese, a treaty of peace was agreed upon between Sir Henry Pottinger and the Commissioner for the Chinese Emperor. By this treaty not only was a large money indemnity obtained from the Emperor for the costs of the war, but the four additional ports of Amoy, Foo-chow, Ning-po, and Shanghai were declared open for the future to British trade, and the Island of Hong-Kong was ceded in perpetuity to Great Britain. On this footing things went on, though not without strain, till 1856, when a new war broke out. The immediate cause was the seizure by the Chinese, on the 8th of October in that year, of the crew of a Hong-Kong "lorcha" or trading vessel called *The Arrow*, followed by certain other high-handed proceedings of contempt and defiance by the Chinese Imperial Commissioner Yeh. Not till June 1858 were the Chinese compelled into submission and into the signing of another treaty,—called the Treaty of Tien-Tsin,—by which not only was liberty of travel over the interior of China granted to British subjects, with access for commercial purposes and right of residence in certain Chinese cities in addition to the five of the previous treaty, but toleration of Christianity in China was guaranteed, and direct diplomatic intercourse was

established between her Britannic Majesty and the Chinese Emperor himself at Peking.—It was this war of 1856-8, while it was yet only in its beginnings, and hardly in actual progress, that drew from De Quincey a new expression of the strong views which he had long entertained on the subject of British relations with China. No man of his generation had more of the “John Bull” spirit, or, as it is now called, the “Jingo” spirit, in his notions of the proper behaviour of Britain under any insult from a foreign power; China, as known to him by his readings, had always been an object of his special abomination; and it is just possible that the fact that one of his sons had died in China in military service (see *ante*, Vol. IV, p. 8) had imparted a tinge of bitter personal interest to this theoretical antipathy. At all events, no sooner had he heard of the affair of the seizure of the *lorcha* in October 1856, and of Commissioner Yeh’s subsequent defiance of British power and the British flag, than he was up in flame. Though the Collective Edition of his Writings was then on hand,—only five of the volumes out, and the publisher, Mr. Hogg, waiting anxiously for the rest,—he interrupted that labour in order to contribute to Mr. Hogg’s then current Edinburgh periodical called *Titan* (described *ante*, Vol. I, p. xiv, as a continuation in monthly form of the previous Edinburgh weekly called *Hogg’s Instructor*) two articles on China and the China Question. The first appeared in the number of *Titan* for February 1857, and the second in the April number. Then, not content with such magazine circulation of his views, he republished the two articles, with a Preliminary Note, a Preface, and other additions, in the form of an independent pamphlet. Nor did this suffice. He recurred to the subject in a third article for *Titan*, published in July 1857. Altogether, in the first half of 1857, he had written as much on the subject of the new British war with China as would make, if printed entire, about 90 pages of the text of the present volume.—He did not himself reprint any portion of all this Chinese matter in any of the volumes of his Collective Edition that occupied his remaining and last years, but left the whole lying in the condition in which it had been produced,—namely, as a separate piece of literary industry collateral by chance with the middle volumes of his Collective Edition. Naturally this was not satisfactory; and, when Messrs. Black completed their new issue of the collected writings by the publication in 1871 of the second of their supplementary volumes, care was taken to include in the volume that central portion of the straggle of successively published matter which De Quincey himself had entitled simply “China,” and which might be supposed therefore to contain the permanent core of his disquisitions as distinct from the ephemeral appendages. It is even more unnecessary to reproduce in the present volume,—already containing as it does the whole of De Quincey’s long and hitherto forgotten dissertation on the previous war with China,—the entire aggregate of what he wrote in 1857 on the occasion of the second Chinese War. Much of what he then wrote was but repetition and reapplication of the views of his previous paper, or is otherwise now defunct; and it is enough therefore to conserve that most sub-



stantial and novel portion of the whole which was reprinted under the title "China"—De Quincey's own title for it,—in Messrs. Black's re-issue of the Collective Edition. This is, indeed, the sole portion that has now the interest of *literary* value. To distinguish this Chinese article of 1857 from its predecessor of 1840, we have, however, enlarged the form of the title.—M.]

IN the days of Grecian Paganism, when morals (whether social or domestic) had no connexion whatever with the National Religion, it followed that there could be no organ corresponding to our modern PULPIT (Christian or Mahometan) for teaching and illustrating the principles of morality. Those principles, it was supposed, taught and explained themselves. Every man's understanding, heart, and conscience, furnished him surely with light enough for his guidance on a path so plain, within a field so limited, as the daily life of a citizen—Spartan, Theban, or Athenian. In reality, this field was even more limited than at first sight appeared. Suppose the case of a Jew, living in pre-Christian Judea, under the legal code of Deuteronomy and Leviticus; or suppose a Mussulman at this day, living under the control of Mahometan laws. He finds himself left to his own moral discretion hardly in one action out of fifty; so thoroughly has the municipal law of his country (the *Pentateuch* in the one case, the *Koran* in the other) superseded and swallowed up the freedom of individual movement. Very much of the same legal restraint tied up the fancied autonomy of the Grecian citizen. Not the moral censor, but the constable, was at his heels, if he allowed himself too large a licence. In fact, so small a portion of his actions was really resigned to his own discretion that the very humblest intellect was equal to the call upon its energies. Under these circumstances what need for any public and official lecturer upon distinctions so few, so plain, so little open to casuistic doubts? To abstain from assault and battery; not to run away from battle *relicta non bene parmula*; not to ignore the deposit confided to his care: these made up the sum of cases that life brought with it as possibilities in any ordinary experience. As an office, therefore, the task of teaching morality was amongst the ancients wholly superfluous. Pulpit there was none, nor any public teacher

of morality. As regarded his own moral responsibility, every man walked in broad daylight, needed no guide, and found none.

But Athens, the marvellous city that in all things ran ahead of her envious and sullen contemporaries, here also made known her supremacy. Civilisation, not as a word, not as an idea, but as a thing, but as a power, was known in Athens. She only through all the world had a theatre, and in the service of this theatre she retained the mightiest by far of her creative intellects. Teach she could not in those fields where no man was unlearned ; light was impossible where there could be no darkness ; and to guide was a hopeless pretension when all aberrations must be wilful. But, if it were a vain and arrogant assumption to illuminate, as regarded those primal truths which, like the stars, are hung aloft, and shine for all alike,<sup>1</sup> neither vain nor arrogant was it to fly her falcons at game almost as high. If not light, yet life ; if not absolute birth, yet moral regeneration, and fructifying warmth : these were quickening forces which abundantly she was able to engraft upon truths else slumbering and inert. Not affecting to teach the new, she could yet vivify the old. Those moral echoes, so solemn and pathetic, that lingered in the ear from her stately tragedies, all spoke with the authority of voices from the grave. The great phantoms that crossed her stage all pointed with shadowy fingers to shattered dynasties and the ruins of once-regal houses, Pelopidæ or Labdacidæ, as monuments of sufferings in expiation of violated morals, or sometimes—which even more thrillingly spoke to human sensibilities—of guilt too awful to be expiated. And, in the midst of these appalling records, what is their ultimate solution ? From what keynote does Athenian Tragedy trace the expansion of its own dark impassioned music ? ‘Υβρις (*hybris*)—the spirit of outrage and arrogant self-assertion—in that temper lurks the original impulse towards wrong ; and to that temper the Greek Drama adapts its monitory legends. The doctrine of

<sup>1</sup> I quote a sentiment of Wordsworth's in "The Excursion," but cannot remember its expression. [The expression is "The primal duties shine aloft, like stars." It is in Book IX of *The Excursion*.—M.]



the Hebrew Scriptures as to vicarious retribution is at times discovered secretly moving through the scenic poetry of Athens. His own crime is seen hunting a man through five generations, and finding him finally in the persons of his innocent descendants. "Curses, like young fowls, come home in the evening to roost." This warning doctrine, adopted by Southey as a motto to his "Kehama," is dimly to be read moving in shadows through the Greek legends and semi-historic traditions. In other words, atrocious crime of any man towards others in his stages of power comes round upon him with vengeance in the darkening twilight of his evening. And, accordingly, upon no one feature of moral temper is the Greek Tragedy more frequent or earnest in its denunciations than upon all expressions of self-glorification or of arrogant disparagement applied to others.

What nation is it, beyond all that ever have played a part on this stage of Earth, which ought, supposing its vision cleansed for the better appreciation of things and persons, to feel itself primarily interested in these Grecian denunciations? What other than China? When Coleridge, in lyric fury, apostrophised his mother-country in terms of hyperbolic wrath, almost of frenzy—

"The nations hate thee!"

every person who knew him was aware that in this savage denunciation he was simply obeying the blind impulse of momentary partisanship; and nobody laughed more heartily than Coleridge himself, some few moons later, at his own violence. But in the case of China this apostrophe—*The nations hate thee!*—would pass by acclamation, without needing the formality of a vote. Such has been the inhuman insolence of this vilest and silliest amongst nations towards the whole household of man that (upon the same principle as governs our sympathy with the persons and incidents of a novel or a drama) we are pledged to a moral detestation of all who can be supposed to have participated in its constant explosions of unprovoked contumely to ourselves. A man who should profess esteem for Shakspeare's Iago would himself become an object of disgust and suspicion. Yet Iago is

but a fabulous agent; it was but a dream in which he played so diabolic a part. But the offending Chinese not only supported that flesh-and-blood existence which Iago had not, but also are likely (which Iago is not in any man's dreams) to repeat their atrocious insolences as often as opportunities offer. Our business at present with the Chinese is to speculate a little upon the future immediately before us, so far as it is sure to be coloured by the known dispositions of that people, and so far as it ought to be coloured by changes in our inter-relations, dictated by our improved knowledge of the case, and by that larger experience of Chinese character which has been acquired since our last treaty with their treacherous executive. Meantime, for one moment let us fix our attention upon a remarkable verification of the old saying, adopted by Southey, that "curses come home to roost."

Two centuries have elapsed, and something more, since our national expansion brought us into a painful necessity of connecting ourselves with the conceited and most ignorant inhabitants of China. From the very first our connexion had its foundations laid in malignity so far as the Chinese were concerned, in affected disdain, and in continual outbreaks of brutal inhospitality. That we should have reconciled ourselves to such treatment formed, indeed, one-half of that apology which might have been pleaded on behalf of the Chinese. But why, then, *did* we reconcile ourselves? Simply for a reason which offers the other half of the apology—namely, that no thoroughly respectable section of the English nation ever presented itself at Canton in those early days as candidates for any share in so humiliating a commerce. On reviewing that memorable fact, we must acknowledge that it offers some inadequate excuse on behalf of the Chinese. They had seen nothing whatever of our national grandeur; nothing of our power; of our enlightened and steadfast constitutional system; of our good faith; of our magnificent and ancient literature; of our colossal charities and provision for every form of human calamity; of our insurance system, which so vastly enlarged our moneyed power; of our facilities for combining and using the powers of all (as in our banks the



money of all) for common purposes ; of our mighty shipping interest ; of our docks, arsenals, lighthouses, manufactories, private or national. Much beside there was that they could not have understood, so that not to have seen it was of small moment ; but these material and palpable indications of power and antiquity even Chinamen,—even Changs and Fangs, Chungs and Fungs,—could have appreciated. Yet all these noble monuments of wisdom and persevering energy they had seen absolutely not at all ; and the men of our nation who had resorted to Canton were too few at any time to suggest an impression of national greatness. Numerically, we must have seemed a mere vagrant tribe ; and,—as the Chinese, even in 1851, and in the council-chamber of the Emperor, settled it as the most plausible hypothesis that the English People had no territorial home, but made a shift (like some birds) to float upon the sea in fine weather, and in rougher seasons to run for “holes,”—upon the whole we English are worse off than are the naked creatures that affront the elements.

“ If on windy days the raven  
Gambol like a dancing skiff,  
Not the less he loves his haven  
On the bosom of a cliff.  
Though almost with eagle pinion  
O'er the rocks the chamois roam,  
Yet he has some small dominion  
Which no doubt he calls his home.”

Yes, no doubt. But, worse off than all these—than sea-horse, raven, chamois—the Englishman, it seems, of Chinese ethnography has not a home, except in crevices of rocks. What are we to think of that nation which by its supreme councils could accredit such follies ? We in fact suffer from the same cause, a thousandfold exaggerated, as that which injured the French in past times amongst ourselves. Up to the time when Voltaire came twice to England, no Frenchman of eminence or distinguished talents had ever found a sufficient motive for resisting his home-loving indolence so far as to pay us a visit. The *court* had been visited in the days of James I. by Sully ; in those of Charles II by De Grammont ; but the nation for itself, and with an honour-

able enthusiasm, first of all by Voltaire. What was the consequence? No Frenchman ever coming amongst us, except (1) as a cook, (2) as a hairdresser, (3) as a dancing-master—was it unnatural in the English to appreciate the French nation accordingly?—

“Paulum sepultæ distat inertię  
Celata virtus.”

What they showed us, *that*, in commercial phrase, we carried to their account; what they gave, for *that* we credited them; and it was unreasonable to complain of *our* injustice in a case where so determinately they were unjust to themselves. Not until lately have we in England done any justice to the noble qualities of our French neighbours. But yet, for this natural result of the intercourse between us, the French have to thank themselves.

With Canton the case was otherwise. Nobody having freedom could be expected to visit such a dog-kennel, where all alike were muzzled, and where the neutral ground for exercise measured about fifteen pocket-handkerchiefs. Accordingly, the select few who had it *not* in their power to stay away proclaimed themselves *ipso facto* as belonging to that class of persons who were willing to purchase the privilege of raising a fortune at any price, and through any sacrifice of dignity, personal or national. Almost excusably, therefore, the British were confounded for a time with the Portuguese and the Dutch, who had notoriously practised sycophantic arts, carried to shocking extremities. The first person who taught the astonished Chinese what difference might happen to lurk between nation and nation was Lord Anson: not yet a lord; in fact, a simple commodore, and in a crazy old hulk; but who, in that same superannuated ship, had managed to plough up the timbers of the *Acapulco* galleon, though by repute<sup>1</sup> bullet-proof, and eventually to

<sup>1</sup> “*By repute*”:—The crew of the *Centurion* were so persuaded that these treasure-galleons were impregnable to ordinary cannon-balls that the commodore found it advisable to reason with them; and such was their confidence in him that, upon his promise to find a road into the ship if they would only lay him alongside of her, they unanimously voted the superstition a Spanish lie.



make prize of considerably more than half-a-million sterling for himself and his crew. Having accomplished this little feat, the commodore was not likely to put much value upon the "crockery ware" (as he termed the forts) of the Chinese. Not come, however, upon any martial mission, he confined himself to so much of warlike demonstration as sufficed for his own immediate purposes. To place our Chinese establishments upon a more dignified footing was indeed a most urgent work, but work for councils more deliberate, and for armaments on a far larger scale. As regarded the present, such was the vast distance between Canton and Peking that there was no time for this Anson aggression to reach the ears of the Emperor's Council before all had passed off. It was but a momentary typhoon, that thoroughly frightened the Flowery People, but was gone before it could influence their policy. By a pleasant accident, the Manilla treasure captured by Anson was passing in waggons in the rear of St. James's Palace during the natal hour of the Prince of Wales (George IV) ; consequently we are within sight, chronologically, of the period which will round the century dated from Lord Anson's assault. Within that century is comprised all that has ever been done by war or by negotiation to bring down upon their knees this ultra-gasconading, but also ultra-pusillanimous, nation. Some thirty and more years after the Anson skirmish, it was resolved that the best way to give weight and splendour to our diplomatic overtures was by a solemn embassy, headed by a man of rank. At that time the East India Company had a monopoly interest in the tea trade of Canton, as subsequently in the opium trade. What we had to ask from the Chinese was generally so reasonable, and so indispensable to the establishment of our national name upon any footing of equality, that it ought not for a moment to have been tolerated as any subject for debate. There is a difficulty often experienced even in civilised Europe of making out any just equations between the titular honours of different states. Ignorant people are constantly guided in such questions by mere vocal resemblances. The acrimonious Prince Pückler Muskau, so much irritated at being mistaken in France for an Englishman, and in fifty ways betraying

his mortifying remembrances connected with England, charges us with being immoderately addicted to a reverential homage towards the title of "Prince"; in which, to any thoughtful man, there would be found no subject for blame; since with us there *can* be no prince<sup>1</sup> that is not by blood connected with the royal family; so that such a homage is paid under an erroneous impression as to the fact, but not the less under an honourable feeling as to the purpose,—which is that of testifying the peculiar respect in a free country cheerfully paid to a constitutional throne. But, if we had been familiarised with the mock princes of Sicily and Russia (amongst which last are found some reputed to have earned a living in St. Petersburg as barbers), we should certainly moderate our respect towards the bearers of princely honours. Every man of the world knows how little a French marquise or comtesse can pretend to rank with a British marchioness or countess; as reasonably might you suppose an equation between a modern consul of commerce and the old Roman consul of the awful S.P.Q.R.

In dealing with a vile trickster like the Chinese executive—unacquainted with any one restraint of decorum or honourable sensibility—it is necessary for a diplomatist to be constantly upon his guard, and to have investigated all these cases of international equation, before coming abruptly to any call for a decision in some actual case. Cromwell was not the man to have attached much importance to the question of choosing a language for the embodying of a treaty, or for the intercourse of the hostile envoys in settling the terms of such a treaty; and yet, when he ascertained that the French Court made it a point of honour to use their own language in the event of any modern language being tolerated, he insisted upon the adoption of Latin as the language of the treaty.<sup>2</sup> With the Chinese a special, almost a superstitiously

<sup>1</sup> "*Can be no prince*": In the technical herakdic usage a duke in our peerage is styled a prince. But this book-honour finds no acceptance or echo in the usage of life; not even in cases like those of Marlborough and Wellington, where the dukes have received prince-doms from foreign sovereigns, and might, under the sanction of their own sovereign, assume their continental honours.

<sup>2</sup> This tells favourably for Cromwell, as an instance of fair and honourable nationality in one direction; and yet in the counter-direc-



minute, attention to punctilios is requisite, because it has now become notorious that they assign a symbolic and representative value to every act of intercourse between their official deputies and all foreign ambassadors. Does the ambassador dine at some imperial table,—the Emperor has been feeding the barbarians! Do some of the court mandarins dine with the ambassador,—then the Emperor has deigned to restore happiness to the barbarians by sending those who represent his person to speak words of hope and consolation! Does the ambassador convey presents from his own sovereign to the emperor,—the people of Peking are officially informed that the Barbarians are bringing their tribute! Does the Emperor make presents to the ambassador,—in that case his Majesty has been furnishing the means of livelihood to barbarians exhausted by pestilence, and by the failure of crops! Huc, the French missionary, who travelled in the highest north latitudes of China, traversing the whole of the frightful deserts between Peking and Lassa (or, in his nomenclature, La Sae), the capital of Thibet, and who, speaking the Mongol language, had the rare advantage of passing for a native subject of the Chinese Emperor, and therefore of conciliating unreserved confidence, tells us of some desperate artifices practised by the imperial government. In particular, he mentions this:—Towards the close of the British War a Tartar general, reputed invincible, had been summoned from a very distant post in the north to Peking, and thence immediately despatched against the detested enemy. Upon this man's *prestige* of invincibility, and upon the notorious fact that he really had been successful in repressing some predatory aggressors in one of the Tartarys, great hopes were built of laurel crops to be harvested without end, and of a dreadful

tion, how ill it tells for his discernment that, in forecasting a memoir on his own career for continental use, and therefore properly to be written in Latin, his thoughts turned (under some accountable bias) to continental writers, descending even to such a fellow as Meric Casaubon,—the son, indeed, of an illustrious scholar, but himself a man of poor pretensions,—and all the while this English-hearted Protector utterly overlooked his own immortal secretary. [The use of Latin in all diplomatic intercourse with foreign powers had begun under the English Commonwealth before Cromwell's accession to the sovereignty; and he only continued it.—M.]

retribution awaiting the doomed barbarian enemy. Naturally this poor man, in collision with the English forces, met the customary fate. M. Huc felt, therefore, a special curiosity to learn in what way the Chinese Government had varnished the result in this particular case, upon which so very much of public interest had settled. This interest being in its nature so personal, and the name of the Tartar hero so notorious, it had been found impossible for the imperial government to throw their mendacity into its usual form of blank denial applied to the total result, or of intricate transformation applied to the details. The Barbarians, it was confessed, had for the present escaped. The British defeat had *not* been of that vast extent which was desirable. But why? The reason was that, in the very paroxysm of martial fury, on coming within sight of the Barbarians, the Tartar general was seized by the very impertinent<sup>1</sup> passion of pity. He pitied the poor wretches; through which mistake in his passions the red-haired devils effected their escape, doing, however, various acts of mischief in the course of the said escape: such being the English mode of gratitude for past favours.

With a Government capable of frauds like these, and a People (at least in the mandarin class) trained through centuries to a conformity of temper with their Government, we shall find, in the event of any more extended intercourse with China, the greatest difficulty in maintaining the just equations of rank and privilege. But the difficulty as regards the people of the two nations promises to be a trifle by comparison with that which besets the relations between the two crowns. We came to know something more circumstantially about this question during the second decennium of this nineteenth century. The unsatisfactoriness of our social position had suggested the necessity of a second embassy. Probably it was simply an accidental difference in the temper of those forming at that time the imperial council which caused the ceremonial *ko-tou* of court presentation to be debated with so much more of rancorous bigotry. Lord Amherst was now the ambassador, a man of spirit and dignity,

<sup>1</sup> "*Impertinent*":—That is, according to an old and approved Parliamentary explanation, not pertinent, irrelevant.



to whom the honour of his country might have been safely confided, had he stood in a natural and intelligible position ; but it was the inevitable curse of an ambassador to Peking that his official station had contradictory aspects, and threw him upon incompatible duties. His first duty was to his country ; and nobody, in so many words, denied *that*. But this patriotic duty, though a *conditio sine qua non* for his diplomatic functions, and a perpetual restraint upon their exercise, was not the true and efficient *cause* of his mission. That lay in the commercial interests of a great Company. This secondary duty was clearly his paramount duty as regarded the good sense of the situation. Yet the other was the paramount duty as regarded the sanctity of its obligation, and the impossibility of compromising it by so much as the shadow of a doubt or the tremor of a hesitation. Nevertheless, Lord Amherst was plied with secret whispers (more importunate than the British public knew) from the East India Company, suggesting that it was childish to lay too much stress on a pure ceremonial usage, of no more weight than a bow or a curtsy, and which pledged neither himself nor his country to any consequences. But, in its own nature, the homage was that of a slave. Genuflexions, prostrations, and knockings of the ground nine times with the forehead, were not modes of homage to be asked from the citizen of a free state, far less from that citizen when acting as the acknowledged representative of that state.

For one moment, let us pause to review this hideous degradation of human nature which has always disgraced the East. That no Asiatic state has ever debarbarised itself is evident from the condition of WOMAN at this hour all over Asia, and from this very abject form of homage which already in the days of Darius and Xerxes we find established, and extorted from the compatriots of Miltiades and Themistocles.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We may see by the recorded stratagem of an individual Greek, cunning enough, but, on the other hand, not at all less base than that which he sought to escape, that these prostrations (to which Euripides alludes with such lyrical and impassioned scorn, in a chorus of his "Orestes," as fitted only for Phrygian slaves) must have been exacted from all Greeks alike, as the *sine qua non* for admission to the royal presence. Some Spartan it was, already slavish enough by his train-

There cannot be any doubt that the *ko-tou* had descended to the court of Susa and Persepolis from the elder court of Babylon, and to *that* from the yet elder court of Nineveh. Man in his native grandeur, standing erect, and with his countenance raised to the heavens

(*Os homini sublime dedit, cælumque tueri*),

presents a more awful contrast to man when passing through the shadow of this particular degradation than under any or all of the other symbols at any time devised for the sensuous expression of a servile condition—scourges, ergastula, infibulation, or the neck-chains and ankle-chains of the Roman *atriensis*. The “bloody writing” is far more legible in this than any other language by which the slavish condition is or can be published to the world, because in this only the sufferer of the degradation is himself a party to it, an accomplice in his own dishonour. All else may have been the stern doom of calamitous necessity. Here only we recognise, without an opening for disguise or equivocation, the man’s own deliberate act. He has not been branded passively (personal resistance being vain) with the record of a master’s ownership, like a sheep, a mule, or any other chattel, but has solemnly branded himself. Wearing, therefore, so peculiar and differential a character, to whom is it in modern days that this bestial yoke of servitude as regards Christendom owes its revival? Without hope, the Chinese despot would not have attempted

ing, who tried the artifice of dropping a ring, and affecting to pass off his prostrations as simply so many efforts to search for and to recover his ring. But, to the feelings of any honourable man, this stratagem would not avail him. One baseness cannot be evaded by another. The anecdote is useful, however; for this picturesque case, combined with others, satisfactorily proves that the sons of Greece could and did submit to the *ko-tou* for the furtherance of what seemed to them an adequate purpose. Had newspapers existed in those days, this self-degradation would have purchased more infamy in Greece than benefit in Persia. The attempted evasion by this miserable Greek, who sought to have the benefits of the *ko-tou* without paying its price,—thinking, in fact, that honour could be saved by swindling,—seems on a level with that baseness ascribed (untruly, it may be hoped) to Galileo; whom some persons represent as seeking to evade his own formal recantation of the doctrine as to the earth’s motion by muttering inaudibly, “But it *does* move, for all that.” This would have been the trick of the Grecian ring-dropper.



to enforce such a Moloch vassalage upon the western world. Through whom, therefore, and through whose facile compliance with the insolent exaction, did he first conceive this hope?

It has not been observed, so far as we know, that it was Peter I of Russia, vulgarly called Peter the Great, who prepared for us that fierce necessity of conflict, past and yet to come, through which we British, standing alone—but henceforth, we may hope, energetically supported by the United States, if not by France—have, on behalf of the whole Western Nations, victoriously resisted the arrogant pretensions of the East. About four years after the death of our Queen Anne, Peter despatched from St. Petersburg (his new capital, yet raw and unfinished) a very elaborate embassy to Peking, by a route which measured at least ten thousand versts, or, in English miles, about two-thirds of that distance. It was, in fact, a vast caravan, or train of caravans, moving so slowly that it occupied sixteen calendar months in the journey. Peter was by natural disposition a bully. Offering outrages of every kind upon the slightest impulse, no man was so easily frightened into a retreat and abject concessions as this drunken prince. He had at the very time of this embassy submitted tamely to a most atrocious injury from the eastern side of the Caspian. The Khan of Khiva—a place since made known to us all as the foulest of murdering dens—had seduced by perfidy the credulous little army despatched by Peter into quarters so widely scattered that with little difficulty he had there massacred nearly the whole force; about three or four hundreds out of so many thousands being all that had recovered their vessels on the Caspian. This atrocity Peter had pocketed, and apparently found his esteem for the Khan greatly increased by such an instance of energy. He was now meditating, by this great Peking embassy, two objects: first, the ordinary objects of a trading mission, together with the adjustment of several disputes affecting the Russian frontier towards Chinese Tartary and Thibet; but, secondly, and more earnestly, the privilege of having a resident minister at the capital of the Chinese Emperors. This last purpose was connected with an evil result for all the rest of Christendom.

It is well known to all who have taken any pains in studying the Chinese temper and character that obstinacy—obstinacy like that of mules—is one of its foremost features. And it is also known, by a multiplied experience, that the very greatest importance attaches in Chinese estimate to the initial movement. Once having conceded a point, you need not hope to recover your lost ground. The Chinese are, as may easily be read in their official papers and acts, intellectually a very imbecile people; and their peculiar style of obstinacy is often found in connexion with a feeble brain, and also (though it may seem paradoxical) with a feeble moral energy. Apparently, a secret feeling of their own irresolution throws them for a vicarious support upon a mechanic resource of artificial obstinacy. This peculiar constitution of character it was, on the part of the Chinese, which gave such vast importance to what might now be done by the Russian ambassador. Who was he? He was called M. de Ismaeloff, an officer in the Russian guards, and somewhat of a favourite with the Czar. What impressed so deep a value upon this gentleman's acts at this special moment was that a great crisis had now arisen for the appraisal of the Christian Nations. None hitherto had put forward any large or ostentatious display of their national pretensions. Generally, for the scale of rank as amongst the Chinese, who know nothing of Europe, they stood much upon the casual proportions of their commerce, and in a small degree upon old concessions of some past Chinese ruler, or upon occasional encroachments that had become settled through lapse of time. But in the East all things masqueraded and belied their home character. Popish peoples were, at times, the firmest allies of bigoted Protestants; and the Dutch,—that in Europe had played the noblest of parts as the feeble (yet eventually the triumphant) asserters of national rights,—everywhere in Asia, through mean jealousy of England, had become but a representative word for hellish patrons of slavery and torture. All was confusion between the two scales of appreciation, domestic and foreign, European and Asiatic. But now was coming one that would settle all this in a transcendent way; for Russia would carry in her train, and compromise by her decision, most of the other Christian states. The very



frontier line of Russia, often conterminous with that of China, and the sixteen months' journey, furnished in themselves exponents of the Russian grandeur. China needed no interpréter for *that*. She herself was great in pure virtue of her bigness. But here was a brother bigger than herself. We have known and witnessed the case where a bully, whom it was found desirable to eject from a coffee-room, upon opening the window for that purpose, was found too big to pass, and also nearly too heavy to raise, unless by machinery; so that in the issue the bully maintained his ground by virtue of his tonnage. That was really the case oftentimes of China. Russia seemed to stand upon the same basis of right as to aggression. China, therefore, understood her, and admired her, but, for all *that*, meant to make a handle of her. She judged that Russia, in coming with so much pomp, had something to ask. So had China. China, during that long period when M. de Ismaeloff was painfully making way across the steppes of Asia, had leisure to think what it was that she would ask, and through what temptation she would ask it. There was little room for doubting. Russia, being incomparably the biggest potentate in Christendom (for as yet the United States had no existence), seemed, therefore, to the Chinese mind the greatest, and virtually to include all the rest. What Russia did, the rest would do. M. de Ismaeloff meant doubtless to ask for something. No matter what it might be, he should have it. At length the ambassador arrived. All his trunks were unpacked; and then M. de Ismaeloff unpacked to the last wrapper his own little request. The feeble-minded are generally cunning; and therefore it was that the Chinese Council did not at once say *yes*, but pretended to find great difficulties in the request,—which was simply to arrange some disorders on the frontier, but chiefly to allow of a *permanent* ambassador from the Czar taking up his residence at Peking. At last this demand was granted—but granted conditionally. And what now might be the little condition? “O, my dear fellow, between you and me, such old friends,” said the Chinese minister, “a bauble not worth speaking of: would you oblige me, when presented to the Emperor, by knocking that handsome head of yours nine times—that is, you know, three times three—against

the floor? I would take it very kindly of you; and the floor is padded to prevent contusions." Ismaeloff pondered till the next day; but on that next day he said, "I will do it."—"Do what, my friend?"—"I will knock my forehead nine times against the padded floor." Mr. Bell of Antermoney (which, at times, he writes Auchtermoney) accompanied the Russian ambassador, as a leading person in his suite. A considerable section of his travels is occupied with this embassy. But, perhaps from private regard to the ambassador, whose character suffers so much by this transaction, we do not recollect that he tells us in so many words of this Russian concession. But M. de Lange, a Swedish officer, subsequently employed by the Czar Peter, does. A solemn court-day was held. M. de Ismaeloff attended. Thither came the Allegada, or Chinese Prime Minister; thither came the ambassador's friends and acquaintances; thither came, as having the official *entrée*, the ambassador's friend Hum-Hum, and also his friend Bug-Bug; and, when all is said and done, this truth is undeniable—that there and then (namely, in the imperial city of Peking, and in Anno Domini 1720) M. de Ismaeloff did knock his forehead nine times against the floor of the Tartar Khan's palace. M. de Lange's report on this matter has been published separately; neither has the fact of the prostration and the forehead-knockings to the amount of nine ever been called in question.

Now, it will be asked, did Ismaeloff absolutely consent to elongate himself on the floor, as if preparing to take a swim, and then knock his forehead repeatedly, as if weary of life—somebody counting all the while with a stop watch No. 1, No. 2, No. 3, and so on? Did he do all this without capitulating: that is, stipulating for some ceremonial return upon the part of the Chinese?

O no! The Russian ambassador, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and our own at the end of it, both bargained for equal returns; and here are the terms:—The Russian had, with good faith, and through all its nine sections, executed the *ko-tou*; and he stipulated, before he did this, that any Chinese seeking a presentation to the Czar should, in coming to St. Petersburg, go through exactly the same ceremony. The Chinese present all replied with good



faith, though doubtless stifling a little laughter, that *when* they or any of them should come to St. Petersburg the *ko-tou* should be religiously performed. The English lords, on the other hand,—Lord Macartney, and subsequently Lord Amherst,—declined the *ko-tou*, but were willing to make profound obeisances to the Emperor, provided these obeisances were simultaneously addressed by a high mandarin to the portrait of George III. In both cases a man is shocked: by the perfidy of the Chinese in offering, by the folly of the Christian envoys in accepting, a mockery so unmeaning. Certainly the English case is better: our Envoy escaped the degradation of the *ko-tou*, and obtained a shadow; he paid less, and he got in exchange what many would think more. Homage paid to a picture, when counted against homage paid to a living man, is but a shadow; yet a shadow wears some semblance of a reality. But, on the other hand, for the Russian who submitted to an abject degradation, under no hope of any equivalent except in a contingency that was notoriously impossible, the mockery was full of insult. The Chinese do not travel; by the laws of China they cannot leave the country. None but starving and desperate men ever *do* leave the country. All the Chinese emigrants now in Australia, and the great body at this time quitting California in order to evade the pressure of American laws against them, are liable to very severe punishment (probably to decapitation) on re-entering China. Had Ismaeloff known what a scornful jest the Emperor and his Council were enacting at his expense, probably he would have bamboozed some of these honourable gentlemen, on catching them within the enclosed court of his private residence.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There seems to have been a strange blunder at the bottom of all our diplomatic approaches to the Court of China, if we are to believe what the lexicographers tell us,—namely, that the very word in Chinese which we translate ambassador means *tribute-bearer*. If this should be true, it will follow that we have all along been supposed to approach the Emperor in a character of which the meaning and obligations were well known to us, but which we had haughtily resolved to violate. There is, besides, another consideration which calls upon us to investigate this subject. It would certainly be a ludicrous discovery if it should be found that we and the Chinese have been at cross-purposes for so long a time. Yet such things *have* occurred,

However, in a very circuitous way, Ismaeloff *has* had his revenge; for the first step in that retribution which we described as overtaking the Chinese was certainly taken by him. Russia, according to Chinese ideas of greatness, is the greatest (that is, broadest and longest) of Christian states. Yet, being such, she has taken her dose of *ko-tou*. It followed, then, *a fortiori*, that Great Britain should take *hers*. Into this logic China was misled by Ismaeloff. The English were waited for. Slowly the occasions arrived; and it was found by the Chinese, first doubtfully, secondly beyond all doubt, that the *ko-tou* would not do. The game was up. Out of this catastrophe, and the wrath which followed it, grew ultimately the opium-frenzy of Lin, the mad Commissioner of Canton; then the vengeance which followed; next the war, and the miserable defeats of the Chinese. All this followed out of the attempt to enforce the *ko-tou*; which attempt never would have been made but for the encouragement derived from Ismaeloff, the ambassador of so great a power as Russia. But, finally, to complete the great retribution, the war has left behind, amongst other dreadful consequences, the ruin of their army. In the official correspondence of a great officer with the present Emperor, reporting the events of the Tae-ping Rebellion, it is repeatedly declared that the royal troops will not fight,—run

and in the East are peculiarly likely to occur, so radically incompatible is our high civilisation with their rude barbarism; and precisely out of this barbarism grows the very consideration we have adverted to as laying an arrest upon all that else we should have a right to think. It is this:—So mean and unrefined are the notions of oriental nations that, according to those, it is very doubtful indeed whether an eastern potentate would be able to understand or figure to himself any business or office belonging to an ambassador except that of declaring war and defiance, or, secondly, of humbly bringing tribute! Hence, we presume, arises the Chinese rigour in demanding to know the substance of any letter before admitting the bearer of it to the imperial presence; since, if it should happen to contain a defiance, in that case they presume that the messenger might indulge himself in insolence; and this it might not be safe to punish in any nation where the sanctity of heralds still lingers, and a faith in the mysterious perils overtaking all who violate that sanctity. Wherever there are but two categories—war and tributary submission—into which the idea of ambassador subdivides, then it must be difficult for the Chinese to understand in which it is that we mean to present ourselves at Peking.



away upon the slightest pretext, and in fact have been left bankrupt in hope and spirit by the results of their battles with the British. Concurrently with this ruin of the army, the avowed object of this great Rebellion is to *exterminate* the reigning dynasty ; and, if that event should be accomplished, then the whole of this ruin will have been due exclusively to its memorable insolence (the demoniac *hybris* of Greek Tragedy) towards ourselves. Should, on the other hand, the Tae-ping Rebellion, which has now stood its ground for five years [written in 1857], be finally crushed, not the less an enormous revolution—possibly a greater revolution—will then have been accomplished in China, virtually our own work ; and fortunately it will not be in our power to retreat, as hitherto, in a false spirit of forbearance, from the great duties which will await us. The Tae-ping faction, however, though deadly and tiger-like in the spirit of its designs, offers but one element amongst many that are now fermenting in the bosom of Chinese society. We British, as Mr. Meadows informs us (*The Chinese and their Rebellions*), were regarded by the late Emperor—by him who conducted the war against us—as the instruments employed “by Heaven” for executing judgment on his house. He was in the right to think so ; and our hope is that in a very few years we shall proclaim ourselves through Southern Asia as even more absolutely the destroyers of the wicked government which dared to promote and otherwise to reward that child of hell who actually *flayed alive* the unhappy Mr. Stead. That same Government passed over without displeasure the similar atrocity of the man who decapitated nearly two hundred persons,—white, brown, and black, but all subjects of Great Britain, and all confessedly and necessarily unoffending,—as being simply shipwrecked passengers thrown on the shore of China from the *Nerbudda* Indiaman. That same Government gave titles, money, and decorations to a most cowardly officer, on the sole assumption (whether simply false or only exaggerated) that he had secretly poisoned one thousand British troops stationed in the island of Chusan.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In the 26th Regiment alone eight hundred men died. This, it is true, was chiefly at Hong-Kong : but the disease was mysterious ; for

A dreadful echo lingers on the air from our past dealings with the Chinese—an echo from the cry of innocent blood shed many years ago by us British, adulterating wickedly with Chinese wickedness. Not Chinese blood it is that cries from the earth for vengeance, but blood of our own dependent, a poor, humble serving man, whom we British were bound to have protected, but whom, in a spirit of timid and sordid servility to Cantonese insolence, we, trembling for our Factory, menaced by that same wicked mob that even now is too likely to win a triumph over us, and coerced by the agents of the East India Company (always upright and noble in its Indian, always timid and cringing in its Chinese policy), surrendered to the Moloch that demanded him. The case was this:—Always, as against aliens, the Chinese have held the infamous doctrine that the intention, the motive, signifies nothing. If you, being a foreigner, should, by the bursting of your rifle, most unwillingly cause the death of a Chinese, you must die. Luckily we have, since 1841, endgelled them out of this hellish doctrine; but such *was* the doctrine up to 1840. Whilst this law prevailed—namely, in 1784—an elderly Portuguese gunner, on board a Chinaman of ours lying close to Whampoa, was *ordered* to fire a salute in honour of the day, which happened to be June 4, the birthday of George III. The case was an extreme one; for the gunner was not firing a musket or a pistol for his own amusement, but a ship's gun under positive orders. It happened, however, that some wretched Chinese was killed. Immediately followed the usual insolent demand for the unfortunate gunner. Some resistance was made; some disputing and wrangling followed,—the Mephistopheles governor looking on with a smile of deadly derision. A life was what he wanted—blood was what he howled for: *whose* life, *whose* blood, was nothing to him. “Settle it amongst yourselves,” said he to the *gentlemen* of the Factory. They *did* settle it; the poor, passive gunner, who had been obliged to obey, was foully surrendered—was murdered by the Chinese, under

the *stationary* inhabitants of Hong-Kong did not die. Is it not therefore open to reasonable conjecture that the men had swallowed a slow poison?



British connivance ; and things appeared to fall back into their old track.<sup>1</sup>

Since then our commerce has leaped forward by memorable expansions. I that write these words am not superstitious ; but this one superstition has ever haunted me—that foundations laid in the blood of innocent men are not likely to prosper.

<sup>1</sup> De Quincey had told this story before (*ante*, pp. 187-189) ; but the repetition of it here is significant.—M.